

Commissioner's UPDATE

News from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

January — February 2004



**A Message
from
Bradley M.
Campbell,
Commissioner**

New Jersey citizens of all ages must become environmentally informed and involved residents before the state can achieve its goals in environmental protection.

As a result, the department continues to sponsor curriculum supplements and classroom materials, projects and contests, professional development opportunities for teachers, field trip options for families and groups, speakers, public events, volunteer programs, and user-friendly data and information sources to raise environmental awareness.

This newsletter highlights a sample of the educational resources that are available from the department and how to get more information about them.

We are also working to provide students and faculty with safe and healthy school buildings, and this newsletter summarizes what DEP is doing to improve environmental conditions in New Jersey schools.

My personal commitment to environmental protection as well as my career stems from the summer childhood experiences I had at outdoor environmental camps. I know first-hand just how valuable environmental education experiences can be.

Help us improve our environment through education by being informed, getting involved and going outdoors – it's never too late to learn!

Bradley M. Campbell

DEP Plays Key Role in Governor's Healthy Schools Initiative

Advancing Governor James E. McGreevey's commitment to clean, safe and healthy schools in New Jersey, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is working with the State Department of Education and school officials on several key initiatives, including implementation of new laws intended to reduce students' and educators' exposure to chemical pesticides and radon.

The governor recognizes that poor environmental conditions in schools can pose serious health risks and inhibit the learning process. As a result, Governor McGreevey's administration is taking comprehensive steps to protect students and faculty from environmental health hazards in existing school buildings and in new facilities as well.

Radon testing is now under way in many New Jersey public schools, and DEP staff is providing technical assistance and communications support to administrators, teachers and parents. Under the state's school radon testing law, all public schools must be tested for radon by September 2005, and at least every five years thereafter, to help ensure students and staff are not exposed to unhealthy concentrations of radon.

Radon is a colorless, odorless, naturally occurring radioactive gas, the product of uranium decay in soil. Long-term exposure to radon has been linked to lung cancer.

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Senator Barbara Buono, Assemblywoman Linda Stender, Commissioner Campbell and Assembly Majority Leader Joseph Roberts joined Governor James E. McGreevey as he signed into law the Integrated Pest Management Act. The new law will protect the health of teachers, students and administrators in the school environment by limiting the use of pesticides.

Healthy Schools...

Nationally, an estimated 15,000 to 22,000 lung cancer deaths every year are attributed to radon, the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking.

The DEP recommends that schools test for radon on weekdays during the colder weather months of October through March, to obtain the best possible assessment of occupants' exposure during the school year. Tests are conducted to determine radon concentrations in all frequently occupied rooms, such as classrooms and offices, that are in contact with the ground or are directly above unoccupied areas of the basement.

DEP staff is also helping school administrators with the challenge of adopting Integrated Pest Management policies for their school properties. All New Jersey schools must implement Integrated Pest Management policies under legislation Governor McGreevey signed last year to make the state's public, private and charter schools healthier and more environmentally friendly.

Numerous scientific studies link childhood cancer and asthma to pesticide exposure, prompting new approaches to pest management that are environmentally sensitive and encourage the use of alternatives to sprayed chemicals.

If a chemical pesticide proves necessary to combat a school insect infestation, schools are required to notify parents and guardians well in advance of the pesticide application, according to the law. In addition, schools must maintain detailed information about all pesticide use on their property, and respond to inquiries about Integrated Pest Management at their sites.

To ensure New Jersey's new school facilities will be clean and safe, the DEP and the New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation (SCC) in September signed a memorandum of agreement that affects new construction in 30 urban school districts with special educational and financial needs, known as Abbott districts.

Under the agreement, the DEP and SCC will work together to site new schools in the best locations available and ensure that any environmental hazards are addressed during site cleanup. The agreement will also ensure construction is done according to what is best for the local environment.

Once sites are selected, the agreement will help expedite the DEP's permitting process for new construction.

To help Abbott school districts' officials select clean and healthy construction sites, DEP is making available detailed information

about complex regulated or contaminated sites within each of the school districts. This specific information will help school officials decide which sites to avoid in siting new school facilities.

As part of the agreement, the SCC will prepare an environmental site report for DEP review much earlier in the site selection process, so environmental concerns or problems at candidate sites are identified sooner rather than later.

To address healthy school needs for new construction in the Abbott school districts, Governor McGreevey convened the Healthy Schools Sub-Committee, comprising representatives from DEP and the education, health, occupational health and law sectors. Their findings included support for the Governor's Executive Order No. 24, signed in 2002, requiring all new school construction to incorporate environmentally friendly, energy-efficient design guidelines known as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design or LEED.

Developed by the United States Green Building Council, LEED is a leading-edge rating system for designing, constructing and certifying the world's greenest buildings. Based on well-founded scientific standards, LEED emphasizes state-of-the-art strategies for sustainable site location and development, water efficiency, energy use, efficient material use and indoor environmental quality.

Most environmentally friendly "green schools" or high performance schools cost less to maintain and operate, and can provide teachers with countless on-site opportunities for environmental education.



*Commissioner Campbell shared an environmental lesson with students at the Lambertville Elementary School. The Commissioner read from *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss as part of Governor McGreevey's Reading Club Initiative to promote early childhood literacy.*

Visit I-MapNJ at

www.nj.gov/dep

**DEP's interactive
environmental mapping tool**

*Access environmental
information, data, aerial
photographs,
maps and boundaries from
your desktop.*

Celebrate Earth Day,

April 22, 2004

Visit DEP's Earth Day Web site

*regularly for information
about Earth Day events being
planned around New Jersey.*

*[www.nj.gov/dep/seeds/
earthweb/eday.htm](http://www.nj.gov/dep/seeds/earthweb/eday.htm)*

Visit DEP's Public

Participation Calendar

www.nj.gov/dep/calendar/

*Get monthly listings of DEP-
sponsored events,
public meetings, workshops
and much more.*

From SEEDS, Knowledge About Our Environment Grows

SEEDS, the State Environmental Education Directory Web Site, is an online catalog of more than 240 environmental education resources and services that can help students learn about environmental protection, conservation, natural resource management, energy and environmental health.

SEEDS is designed for use by teachers of grades K-12; park, museum, zoo and nature center staff; scout, camp and youth group leaders; parents, families and students; environmental commission members; librarians; college and university faculty; government employees; community leaders, and corporate and business representatives.

The Web site offers a well-organized, user-friendly assortment of field trips, in-class programs, enrichment and training opportunities for teachers, as well as classroom materials, a calendar of events, contests, volunteer programs, grant opportunities, activity pages, posters and publications. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) sponsors or co-sponsors all of the resources available through the online directory, and many of these resources are free.

Maintained by environmental education staff in DEP's Communications Office, SEEDS is extremely popular, averaging 15,000 hits every month. In 2002, SEEDS earned top recognition from Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics, placing first for Best Educational Content in the e-Gov Awards.

The SEEDS website may be accessed from the DEP's homepage at www.state.nj.us/dep. Click on the education icon on the left and you're on your way!

DEP Helps Educators Teach Environmental Topics

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) sponsors nationally recognized, award-winning curriculum supplements that can help educators enhance their lessons on the environment.

Each of the curriculum supplements – Project Learning Tree, Project WILD, Aquatic Project WILD and Project WET – uses natural resources (land and forest, wildlife and habitat, aquatic habitats and water) as foundations to teach about ecology, human environmental impacts, conservation management and planning, uses of the resource, pollution, and other related issues.

Developed and evaluated by teachers, administrators and natural resource professionals nationwide, the supplements are designed for use with students in preschool through the secondary grades and directly support numerous New Jersey classroom standards.

For details on these curriculum supplements, visit www.nj.gov/dep/seeds and click on "Enrichment and Training Opportunities."

SEEDS, DEP's environmental education website, provides a wealth of information for students, educators and the general public.

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Visit us on the web at: www.nj.gov/dep

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Call Our Toll-free 24 Hour Hotline 1-877-WARNDEP (1-877-927-6337) to Report an Environmental Incident Impacting New Jersey.

Fostering Environmental Literacy is Key Goal of NJ Commission on Environmental Education, Interagency Work Group

Members of the New Jersey Commission on Environmental Education and Interagency Work Group work with state government representatives to guide, improve and increase the delivery of sound environmental education for all New Jerseyans.

During this school year, the groups are focusing on two initiatives – a teacher survey on environmental education and an environmental primer. Survey findings will provide a foundation for up-dating curriculum recommendations in the state's revised master plan for environmental education. The primer will offer concise, easy-to-understand descriptions of environmental terms commonly used by environmental professionals and the media. It is expected to be available for distribution on Earth Day, April 22, 2004.

Environmental education staff in the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Communications Office provides administrative support to both the commission and work group.

Created in 1989 by Executive and Administrative Orders, the commission researched the status of environmental education in New Jersey and compared it with other states. The commission then developed a master plan for environmental education, titled *Environmental Education in New Jersey: A Plan of Action*, presented to state officials in 1993. In 1996, legislators passed the New Jersey Environmental Education Act, statutorily charging both groups with implementing the state's master plan for environmental education.

The master plan seeks to "develop in the citizens of New Jersey the knowledge, attitudes and values, skills and behaviors needed to maintain, protect, manage and improve the environment." It includes various goals, guiding principles and recommendations designed to foster environmental literacy among all ages and audiences statewide. The commission and work group will update the master plan's recommendations during the 2004-05 school year.

Commission membership includes representatives from environmental, conservation, civic, youth and faith-based organizations; public and private schools, colleges and universities; businesses and industry, and government, including the State Department of Education. The work group comprises representatives from more than a half dozen state agencies.

For further information about the commission, the work group and DEP's environmental education program, contact the department's environmental education staff at (609) 984-9802.
